

Sports

Zniti saves penalty to boost Raja hopes of dethroning Ahly

Brazilian Azulao stars as Angolan club Petro upset Sundowns

JOHANNESBURG: Raja Casablanca goalkeeper Anas Zniti saved a penalty in Egypt to boost the chances of the Moroccan club dethroning CAF Champions League holders Al Ahly, despite a 2-1 loss in their quarterfinal first leg. Reduced to 10 men in Cairo before the spot-kick after Marouane Hadhoudi was sent off for handling to prevent a certain goal, Raja were in danger of falling two goals behind on the hour mark.

Amr el Soulia had put Ahly ahead from a 13th-minute penalty that evaded the outstretched right hand of Zniti and landed in the corner of the net. The Egyptian decided to aim for the same corner from the second spot-kick, but this time Zniti pushed the ball away. As Ahly intensified pressure in the final 30 minutes, but a combination of saves by Zniti, brave defending and wild shooting foiled the hosts.

Hussein El-Shahat was the other Ahly scorer, finishing off a superb low cross from South African Percy Tau on 23 minutes at a 40,000-seat Al Salam Stadium that was half full due to coronavirus protocols. Dominant Ahly, who should have been more than two goals ahead as half-time loomed, were stung in first-half added time when Mohamed Zrida halved the deficit with a low shot off a cut-back.

It leaves the pick of the quarterfinals in the marquee African club competition delicately balanced ahead of the return match in Casablanca, which will kick off late on Friday. Footballers are permitted to break the dawn-to-dusk fast during the ongoing Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but most prefer not to.

Elusive title treble

Instead, they eat and drink after dusk and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has agreed to extend the 1900 GMT kick-off deadline, with some matches beginning close to midnight local time. Record 10-time African champions Ahly hope to become the first club to win the competition three consecutive times - a feat that has eluded them and three other sides.

Ahly (2007 and 2014) and Tout Puissant Mazembe (1969 and 2011) from the Democratic Republic of Congo failed twice. Nigerian side Enyimba (2005) and Esperance (2020) of Tunisia were other back-to-back winners of the Champions League who could not complete a treble. The winners between Ahly and Raja will book a two-leg semifinal against Esperance or Entente Setif of Algeria, who were held 0-0 at home in a first leg where the visitors created more chances.

Chabab Belouizdad, the other Algerian contenders for a \$2.5 million first prize, fared even worse than Setif, losing 1-0 at home to two-time champions Wydad Casablanca in Algiers. The Moroccans had to play 83 minutes a man short after VAR changed a yellow card given to Jalal Daoudi for a foul to a red one. But a headed goal by Congo Brazzaville international Guy Mbenza, sporting a pink hair style, 19 seconds into the second half decided a match controlled by Belouizdad without creating many clear-cut chances. Needing a draw in Casablanca next weekend to qualify, Wydad appear set to reach the last-four stage for the sixth time in

seven seasons, and face Petro Luanda of Angola or Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa.

Captain Tiago Azulao scored and created another goal as Angolan club Petro Luanda upset South African visitors Mamelodi Sundowns 2-1 on Saturday in the CAF Champions League. The quarterfinal first leg result at the national stadium in Luanda leaves the tie wide open with the return match scheduled for Johannesburg next Saturday.

Lyle Lakay put Sundowns ahead after only five minutes, Azulao levelled on 16 minutes and Yano Duarte scored what proved the match-winner in first-half added time. Victory for Petro in their first Champions League knockout-stage appearance since losing a 2001 semi-final to Sundowns marked a dramatic turnaround.

In their final group match two weeks ago, Petro suffered a 5-1 drubbing from table-toppers Wydad Casablanca in Morocco. Having scored 21 goals in four domestic league and cup matches, 2016 African champions Sundowns travelled to Angola hopeful of winning with Namibia forward Peter Shalulile in top form. But after Lakay netted off a deflected free-kick, Petro took charge and equalised when Brazilian Azulao slammed a cross past veteran Sundowns goalkeeper Denis Onyango.

The home side deservedly took the lead on the stroke of half-time when an Azulao flick off a cross was parried by Onyango into the path of Yano, who made no mistake. Sundowns pushed hard for an equaliser early in the second half with Shalulile, who has notched 27 domestic and CAF goals this

season, twice going close to scoring.

Penalty appeals rejected

Petro had two penalty appeals rejected by the Zambian referee before Azulao had the ball in the net again only to be correctly ruled offside. Silence enveloped the Estadio 11 de Novembro in added time when Neo Maema appeared to have equalized for Sundowns, but the goal was disallowed after VAR spotted a foul in the build-up. There was still time for Petro to launch another attack and Onyango reacted quickly to turn a shot away at the expense of a corner.

Unlike Europe, where UEFA have scrapped the away-goal rule in club competitions, it still applies in Africa, so a 1-0 second-leg win for Sundowns will suffice to take them to the semifinals. In another first leg, four-time champions Esperance of Tunisia drew 0-0 away to Algerians Entente Setif to confirm they are favored to win the north African showdown.

However, Esperance will lack home support in Rades near Tunis on Friday as the second leg is being staged behind closed doors as punishment for recent unruly behavior by fans of the Tunisian club. The best chances fell during the first half in Algiers with Setif goalkeeper Sofiane Khedairia foiling Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane and Nigerian Kingsley Edeuwo in one-on-one situations. Ghaylene Chaalali then rattled the Setif crossbar with a free-kick while Esperance captain and goalkeeper Moez Ben Cherifia foiled Riad Benayad with a point-blank save at the other end. — AFP

'Bigger goals' as Karthik targets India return

MUMBAI: Dinesh Karthik said he is eyeing an India comeback after his unbeaten 66 off 34 balls powered Royal Challengers Bangalore to a 16-run win over Delhi Capitals on Saturday. The in-form Karthik steered Bangalore to 189 for five after Glenn Maxwell's breezy 55 in the second match of the day in Mumbai. Delhi, who are still searching for their maiden Indian Premier League title, could only muster 173-7 despite a 38-ball 66 from David Warner.

Karthik, a wicketkeeper-batter who has amassed 197 runs while batting mostly at seven, stood out as he put on an unbeaten stand of 97 for the sixth wicket with Shahbaz Ahmed, who hit 32, as Bangalore plundered 69 runs from the last four overs. "I have bigger goals. I've been working really hard. My aim is to do something special for the country," man of the match Karthik, who last played for India in the 2019 50-over World Cup, said. "This is part of my journey. I am doing everything I can to be part of the India team."

The 36-year-old made full use of a dropped catch on five to tear into the opposition attack in the final 18 balls and smashed Mustafizur Rahman for four fours and two sixes in a 28-run 18th over. Bangalore lost their big guns including skipper Faf du Plessis for eight and Virat Kohli run out on 12 before Maxwell unleashed his power to lay the foundation for the total.

The Australia batter, nicknamed 'Big Show' for his extravagant strokeplay, took on left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav in one over to hit 23 runs before he fell to same bowler. In reply, Delhi faltered after Warner's departure and Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood struck twice in one over including the big-hitting Rovman Powell for nought as wheels came off the chase.

Skipper Rishabh Pant attempted to hit back with his 17-ball 34 but became pace bowler Mohammed Siraj's second wicket as Virat Kohli leapt to take a stunning one-handed catch at cover. Bangalore jumped to third in the 10-team table led by newcomers Gujarat Titans.

'Life's not ended'

In the first match of the day, Lucknow Super Giants skipper KL Rahul smashed an unbeaten 103 as they handed five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians their sixth straight loss this season. Rahul, playing his 100th Indian Premier League match, steered Lucknow to 199 for four after being put into bat first at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium.

Mumbai Indians, led by Rohit Sharma, could only manage 181-9 to lose by 18 runs and remain winless in the Twenty20 tournament this edition, further denting their hopes of making the playoffs. But pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah said the team, who won titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020, will bounce back soon. "Life has not ended. Sun is going to rise again tomorrow. This is a game of cricket, somebody has to win, somebody has to lose," a smiling Bumrah told reporters.

"Nobody is as disappointed as we are, nobody from the outside can see the hard work that we have put in. In the rest of the games we will again give our best shot and try to come on the better side." One of the most fancied IPL teams, Mumbai, owned by Nita Ambani, wife of India's richest man Reliance Industries billionaire Mukesh Ambani, stay bottom of the table. — AFP

Thompson-Herah posts fastest 100m of 2022

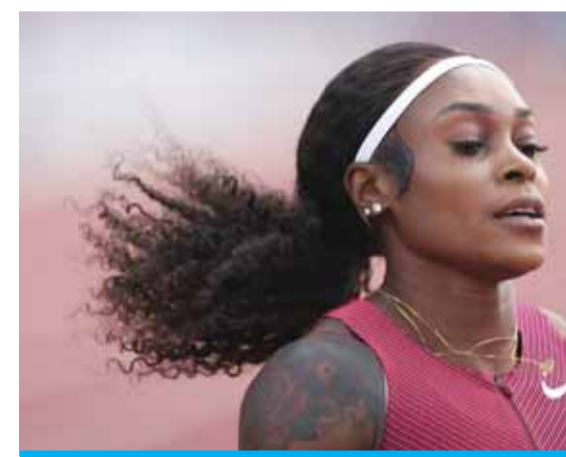
LOS ANGELES: Jamaica's two-time Olympic gold medallist Elaine Thompson-Herah clocked the fastest 100m in the world this year at 10.89sec at the Golden Games at Walnut, California. Thompson-Herah, running her first outdoor 100m of the season, won her semifinal heat in the meeting east of Los Angeles with a favorable wind of 1.6 meters per second.

She opted out of the final, which was won by American Twanisha Terry in a wind-aided 10.77sec. Americans Aleia Hobbs and Gabby Thomas were second and third in the final, run in a favorable wind of 3.3 m/sec. Thomas, the Olympic

200m bronze medalist, notched the fastest time of the season in her preferred distance, winning in 22.02sec ahead of 2019 World silver medalist Brittany Brown.

Fred Kerley, silver medalist in the 100m at the Tokyo Games, won the men's 200m in 19.80sec ahead of fellow American Michael Norman (19.83). World 100m champion Christian Coleman, who is making his return to competition this season after an 18-month suspension for failing to comply with his anti-doping obligations, was announced at the start of the 200m but did not run it.

American Micah Williams won the men's 100m in a wind-aided 9.83sec. Tonia Marshall (12.46) beat Olympic silver medalist Keni Harrison (12.56) in the 100m hurdles. Only Puerto Rican Jasmine Camacho-Quinn, the defending Olympic champion, has run faster this year. Michael Cherry, who won Olympic 4x400m relay gold in Tokyo, ran the fastest 400m of the year in 44.28sec. — AFP



WALNUT, California: Elaine Thompson-Herah of Jamaica crosses the finish line of the women's 100m dash semifinals during the Mt SAC Relays Elite Division & USATF Golden Games at Hilmer Lodge Stadium on April 16, 2022. — AFP

Harry hails Ukraine team's 'bravery' at Invictus Games

THE HAGUE: Britain's Prince Harry on Saturday praised the courage of the Ukraine team at an opening ceremony for the Invictus Games in The Netherlands, where the Ukrainian competitors also received a standing ovation. "Your bravery and choosing to come and of being here tonight cannot be overstated," the Duke of Sussex told the audience at the ceremony in the Dutch city of The Hague.

"Glory to Ukraine," his wife Meghan added in Ukrainian, addressing the team who had travelled to the games despite the invasion of their country ordered by Moscow on Feb 24. Harry said the team had told him of their wish to attend "despite all odds... not simply to show your strength, but to tell your truth. The truth of what is happening in your country. You know we stand with you. The world is united with you and still you deserve more."

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex arrived in The Netherlands on Friday, making their first joint public appearance in Europe since quitting royal life and

moving to North America more than two years ago. A day earlier they had paid a secret visit to Harry's grandmother Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, where they also reportedly met his father Prince Charles, following tensions caused by their interview with chat show queen Oprah Winfrey in which they accused an unnamed member of the royal family of racism.

'We are all behind you'

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told the ceremony that some members of the Ukraine team could not be at the games as they were "fighting on the frontline". "Of course, we are thinking of those Ukrainians in the Invictus community who have paid the ultimate price for their fighting in the war... we are all behind you," he said.

According to the Ukraine team at least four members of the Invictus community there have died in fighting in Ukraine since 2014. Harry, who served with the British army in Afghanistan, founded the Invictus Games for disabled military veterans. More than 500 participants from 20 countries are taking part in the Invictus Games, which have been postponed twice because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Just before the prince's arrival on Friday, the Ukrainian team made their own arrival to great applause. The team of 19 people were present in the Netherlands to take part but said they regretted the



THE HAGUE: The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle, visit the sitting volleyball section of the fifth edition of the Invictus Games on April 17, 2022. — AFP

Dupont steers Toulouse past Ulster into quarters

PARIS: France captain Antoine Dupont scored a last-gasp try, converted by international teammate Thomas Ramos, to seal a one-point aggregate win for Toulouse over Ulster and bag a European Champions Cup quarterfinal Saturday. Dupont crossed for the decisive try just four minutes from time in Belfast, Ulster having won the first leg on French soil.

Ramos' conversion made the difference, a simple kick in front of the posts nailing a 30-23 second-leg victory for a nail-biting 50-49 aggregate win. Holders Toulouse will now face Munster, who overcame a 13-8 first-leg deficit to Exeter to run out 26-10 victors in Limerick. "We got the strategy wrong," said a relieved Toulouse coach Ugo Mola. "We wanted to score very quickly. Too many easy points were given away but we're in the quarter-finals. This team does not give up."

Kiwi playmaker Ihaia West notched up 16 points as last season's losing finalists La Rochelle beat Bordeaux-Begles to line up a quarterfinal against Montpellier, like Toulouse one-point victors over English champions Harlequins. West, along with compatriot Tawera Kerr-Barlow, was instrumental in La Rochelle's 31-23 win over Bordeaux for a 62-36 aggregate score.

Bordeaux's chances crumbled when they were



LA ROCHELLE, France: La Rochelle's Gregory Alldritt runs with the ball during the European Champions Cup rugby union match between La Rochelle and Union Bordeaux-Begles at The Marcel Deflandre Stadium on April 16, 2022. — AFP

reduced to 14 men after 26 minutes as referee Wayne Barnes was left with no choice but to red card Ma'ama Vaipulu for a dangerous off-the-ball shoulder barge. The visitors had no answer as West, France No 8 Gregory Alldritt, Kerr-Barlow and Fiji centre Levani Botia all crossed for tries.

La Rochelle will play Montpellier, who lost the second leg 33-20 but scraped past Harlequins 60-59 on aggregate after England fly-half Marcus Smith missed a conversion in the dying stages. "We're pleased to be able to host them and above all play a quarter-final in front of our fans," Alldritt said. — AFP